



December 2013 - Volume 11 Number 12

日本ヴェダント協会ニュースレター

The Vedanta Kyokai Newsletter

NEWS, UPDATES, AND MISCELLANY FROM THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF JAPAN

JANUARY Calendar



Birthdays

Swami Saradananda

Monday, 6 Jan

Swami Turiyananda

Tuesday, 14 Jan

Swami Vivekananda

Thursday, 23 Jan

Kyokai Events

• New Year Kalpataru •

New Years Day 2014

Zushi Centre - 12 Noon

Annual programme includes a talk, lunch, walk to Kamakura Daibutsu to offer prayers there and at Kinoshita Catholic Church and on to Hachiman Shrine.

• January Zushi Retreat •

Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi Birth Celebration

Sunday, January 20
Puja, Food Offering, Flower Offering, Reading from 11 AM

Lunch / Afternoon Session
Reading, Stories about Mother, Devotional Songs
All, are welcome to attend!



✽Thus Spake✽

"Through spiritual disciplines the ties of past karma are cut asunder. But the realisation of God cannot be achieved without ecstatic love for him."

- Holy Mother - Sri Sarada Devi

"If a meditative man constantly worships Me through the path of devotion, all the desires of his heart are destroyed, for I reside in his heart."

- Sri Krishna

Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago hosts
'Chicago Calling'
Celebrating the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda



The event is the largest gathering of Ramakrishna Mission monks and nuns outside of India. Story on page 2.

In this Issue:

- | | | | |
|---|------------|--|-------------|
| • Thus Spake | ... page 1 | • Vedanta Society of Korea Launches 'Vivek 150 Anniversary Festival' | ... page 6 |
| • Monthly Calendar | ... page 1 | • Thought of the Month | ... page 7 |
| • Chicago Vedanta Society Hosts 'Chicago Calling' Vivekananda 150th Birth Anniversary | ... page 1 | • News Briefs | ... page 8 |
| | | • A Story to Remember | ... page 11 |



Swami Vivekananda's Spiritual Heirs Delve into his Legacy on 150th Birth Anniversary

The Vivekananda Vedanta Society (VVS) of Chicago hosted a two-day conference, 'Chicago Calling,' at the downtown Hilton from November 9, 2013 to commemorate the 150th Birth Anniversary of its illustrious founder, who introduced Hinduism to America through his electrifying address on September 11, 1893 before the World Parliament of Religions (WPR) in Chicago. Attended by fifty monastics from around the world, this first day was devoted to fathoming various aspects of Swami Vivekananda's (SV) legacy now that Hindus and saffron robed monks are a more common sight here.

Asheesh Sen read the welcome address by Illinois Governor Pat Quinn, who had recently declared Sep. 28 state-wide as Swami Vivekananda Day.

Likewise Swami Mahayogananda read Ramakrishna Order President Swami Atmasthananda's message of felicitation that quoted Vivekananda's speech of Sep. 28, 1893 urging Americans to transcend the limitations of the ego by aspiring for infinite individuality.

Several back-to-back talks then followed in morning and afternoon sessions interspersed with appropriate cultural entertainment. Moumita Chatterjee from Kolkata sang classical music. Radhika Bal-

erao sang a devotional song composed by Swami Vivekananda on Lord Shiva, and Swami Gaurangananda sang bhajans. Priyam Bhattacharjee rendered Indian classical and devotional songs, while Prithwiraj Bhattacharjee offered a tabla solo. The University of Chicago South Asian Vocal Ensemble led by Minoo Pashupathi ended the repertoire with Indian Fusion Music.

The following is a list of speakers and their thoughts regarding Swami Vivekananda for 'Chicago Calling':



- Swami Chetananda, Minister of the Vedanta Society of St. Louis, described "The transformation from Narendranath to Swami Vivekananda" contrasting the before and the after. Vivekananda did not believe in non-

dualism (advaita), reincarnation, guru-doctrine, and avatars. Imbibing the ideal of selfless service inculcated by Ramakrishna, Vivekananda became a universal man, possessed of an iron will and uninterrupted vision, who could transfix listeners with his eye.

- For Swami Yogatmananda of the Vedanta Society of Providence the "Role of Swami Vivekananda in Redefining Hinduism and its Impact" was a turning point in

(con't page 3)

Chicago (from page 2)

the history of mankind. He recalled his initial astonishment at Sister Nivedita's claim that Hinduism was created through SV's intervention. He taught nothing new, not already in Upanishads, but only in a new language that highlighted the universal aspect of being a Hindu, when they were still confined to India. He sought an underlying "common basis for our nameless, churchless religions" when it was hard even "to find a common name" for them.

- Speaking on "Swami Vivekananda: a Bridge between the East and the West," Swami Yuktatmananda of the Ramakrishana-Vivekananda Center of New York defined religion as "...character transformation from animal (sensual) life through human to divine (unselfish) nature," that is also the goal of civilisation.

- Speaking on "Vivekananda's Contribution to Humanity," Swami Shantarupananda of the Vedanta Society of Portland emphasised SV's refusal to christianise or hinduize his message of intrinsic freedom—so appealing to and characteristic of America. He also cited various words of appreciation of SV by Western intellectuals.

- Swami Tyagananda of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of Boston focused on

"Swami Vivekananda's Perspective on Strength" as "the one message I hear from the Upanishads," for which the Self is not attained to by the weak. Its manifestation as courage is inhibited by fear and objectless anxiety due to an inability to cope

with change both without and within. Such anxiety is not necessarily pathological but existential and generalised, manifesting as guilt, emptiness, and fear of death in youth, middle, and old age respectively. SV's writings effuse strength, that

"you are the creator of your own destiny."

- Swami Baneshananda from Germany adduced various modern thinkers to drive home the centrality of Man and his inherent freedom to "The Universal Vivekananda," citing Toynbee that our Western beginning will have an Indian ending.

- Speaking on "Swami Vivekananda's Concept of a Perfect Man," Swami Medhasananda, who was here with six Japanese devotees, reminded the audience that SV had come to the USA via the Land of the Rising Sun. "First you understand me (as the perfect Man), then you'll understand Ramakrishna (as the embodiment of divinity)." Whereas each teacher emphasises only his own restricted path, Ramakrishna is the all-inclusive man of the future. SV's mission was to make a new kind of man in his own

(con't page 4)



The Hilton



Swamis listening to presentations

Chicago (from page 3)

mould as signified by the elements constituting the swan emblem he designed for the Ramakrishna Mission. Countering the suspicion of mesmerising his credulous audiences, SV retorted "I'm trying to de-hypnotize you." His "shock therapy" preached contemplative stillness (sattva) to the (over-) active (rajasic) West, and rajas to indolently apathetic (tamasic) India that still appeals to our youth. "Combine the heart of the Buddha with the intellect of Shankara." He smilingly presented Murphy's five laws of how (not) to change society through the mouth of Mullah Nasiruddin. (*Medhasananda's complete talk will be presented in a future issue of The Vedanta Kyokai*).

- Swami Ishtananda, Minister of the Vedanta Center of St. Petersburg, Florida, illustrated "Swami Vivekananda: The Embodiment of Concentration" with his laughing from a bridge at American kids aiming rifles in vain at egg shells bobbing past on the river below.

When challenged to do better, Vivekananda, who had never held a rifle before, hit the targets twelve out of twelve times to their amazement. "All power resides in the control of mind," declared the Swami. Swami Akhandananda would bring books for him and return them the very next day to a skeptical librarian, who

was then baffled at his retention. Beneath his prodigious memory was the power of concentration.

- Swami Amarananda from Geneva dwelt instead on "Swami Vivekananda's Contri-

bution to the East," which often assumed a revolutionary tone. SV underwent agnostic doubt through exposure to radical skeptics like Hume for the benefit of modern humanity. Vivekananda, who talked of Vedanta rather than about Hinduism, was not

a "hereditophile" for he condemned inherited practices such as child betrothal, etc. Instead he wanted to write a new legal code (dharma shastra) to replace fossilised customs. He stressed education, above all for women, citing the Upanishadic examples of Gargi, Maitreyi, etc. He looked ahead towards better Hindu-Muslim rapport on the basis of a "Vedanta brain in an Islamic body."

- Swami Tattwamayana of the Vedanta Society of Northern California's talk, "Vivekananda's Philosophy and What We Need to Do to Implement It," placed at its core the unitary principle of spiritual universalism,

as complementing Western humanism that goes back through St. Augustine to its roots in Greek philosophy. This paradigm change in the history of religious thought around synthesis and harmony renders its recipients incapable of hurting others.



(con't page 5)

Chicago (from page 4)

- Though arrived at from and through divergent scriptural traditions, future spirituality will be non-denominational declared Swami Sarvadevananda of the Vedanta Society of Southern California in his exposition "Swami Vivekananda's contribution to Spiritual Unity in Diversity," which is the plan of creation. We can achieve unity by seeing it as already existing in all.

- Swami Sarvarupananda from Colombo, Sri Lanka distinguished three levels in "Swami Vivekananda: the Embodiment of Selfless Action," directed at the spiritual, social, and the common masses, citing "I shall inspire men everywhere until they reach God; I am poor and I love the poor; only another Vivekananda could have understood me."

- Recalling "A few blessed Americans who helped Vivekananda," Swami Kripamay-ananda of the Vedanta Society of Toronto declared the founder of their order to be "very much present here among us." He recounted the fateful roles played by the likes of Kate Sanborn, Mrs. George W. Hale, Sister Christine, Sarah Bull, Sarah Ellen Waldo, and Josephine McLeod, who remained depressed for two years after his demise.

- Speaking on "Swami Vivekananda: the Embodiment of Knowledge," Swami Nirmalatmananda from Brazil stressed the need to connect heart and mind through his teachings and writings.

- Pravrajika Brahmaprana of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of North Texas argues in, "Swami Vivekananda: The Embodiment of Devotion," that inner knowledge was the basis of his bhakti deriving from direct vision (darshana), whereas Ramakrishna was jnana without and all devotion within. The Master, who died two years after forging this link with Kali, saw Naren as the saviour of souls rather than as simply a perfected man (siddha-

purusha). When criticised by his brother monks for not emphasising devotion sufficiently, he retorted: "Your bhakti is sentimental nonsense" and "I cannot think or talk of Ramakrishna without being overwhelmed."

- General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission Swami Suhitanandaji began by praising Swami Ishatmananda's achievement in bringing this event together despite having been posted to Chicago only a few months before. Recalling how Swami Vireshananda had consecrated Durga Puja funds to flood relief, Suhitanandaji declared that the Ramakrishna Mission places Man higher than God. "Our Mission is composed of a creative minority that requires no qualifications except to declare that you are a Man," and its 172 centres are expanding. He replaced this commemoration in the context of Nivedita's prediction that Vivekananda would be revived after 150 years, citing "these young (American) kids can do anything and everything;" and "if I am to be born again as a woman, I want to be born as an American." His ideas have since percolated into all aspects of thought. He concluded by citing the homage rendered by contemporary world leaders to the man and his mission. •

On the final day of 'Chicago Calling,' 11 September, VVS organised a sight-seeing tour visiting the many locations associated with the memory of Swami Vivekananda, including the Art Institute where Swamiji delivered his famous Chicago Address.

We thank Asian Media USA for this extensive report on the first day of the VVS programme. In the next issue we hope to present accounts and impressions of the programmes from our Japan devotees who attended and participated in 'Chicago Calling.'

(Story and photos edited for space constraints and used with permission © Asian Media USA 2013 - <http://www.asianmediausa.com>)

Seoul, Korea Fetes Swami Vivekananda's 150th Birth Anniversary

A grand festival 'Vivek 150 Anniversary Festival', was celebrated on Oct 20, 2013 on the occasion of 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda at Samsung Convention Hall, Sookmyung Women's University. The festival was organised by the newly established Vedanta Society of Korea in association with Indian culture center, Seoul and Indian chamber of commerce in Korea with great help of Vedanta Society of Japan.

This was the first festival in the history of Korea associated with the life and teachings of Swami Vivekananda at this large a scale. The festival was organised to give tribute to Swami Vivekananda and his teachings about self-awakening, omnipotent power of love, God realisation etc. Mr. H. E. Vishnu Prakash, Honorary Indian Ambassador to Korea and Swami Medhasananda, President of Vedanta Society, Japan and spiritual adviser of Vedanta society of Korea, were the chief guests for this event.

More than 300 people participated and the festival was planned and executed with great combined effort of Mr. Kook Hyun Chang (Secretary General, Indian chamber of commerce, Korea), Dr. Chae Yong Kim (Professor Sogang University), Jeena Lee (Yoga Teacher), Enju Kim (Yoga Teacher), Dr. Abhjit Gosh (Professor, DongSeoul University) and various Korean & Indian groups

in Korea.

Vivek Festival started with the lighting of a lamp and a flower offering at the feet of Vivekananda's portrait, along with Shanti Mantras. It was followed by an audio visual presentation on Swamiji's life which

made the surroundings full of spirituality.

Mr. Kok Hyun Chang, secretary general of Indian Chamber of commerce welcomed participants comprising scholars, students, businessman and representatives of various Indian and Korean groups. He shared how he became deeply involved with this festival even though only recently learned of Swami Vivekananda. He noted that an introduction to Swamiji's philosophy, teachings and thoughts on life compelled him to get more involved and help the Vedanta Society of Korea to spread Swamiji's teachings in Korea.

Speaking on the occasion, Indian Ambassador Vishnu Prakash observed that though Vivekananda's earthly sojourn was short, his message is universal and enduring. Swamiji realised that all religions are equal and God (Atman) was embodied in each individual. Swamiji emphasised yoga, meditation and abstinence while speaking out powerfully against the curse of pov- (con't page 7)





Seoul (from page 6)

erty, prejudice and discrimination. He was a votary of empowerment for women and education.

Swami Medhasananda, president of Vedanta Society of Japan, said that the motive of human life should be service of mankind as a true worship of God. Dr. Chae Yong Kim, Professor, Sogang University noted that Vivekananda had succeeded in presenting ancient wisdom in a simple way that was comprehensible to all.

The Vivekananda Yoga Olympiad, Speech Contest and Exhibition on Life and Work of Swami Vivekananda were other attractions of the event.

The Vivekananda Yoga Olympiad was a competition among various yoga centres in Korea with the spirit of spiritual cooperation. However, the speech contest was organised to get people familiar with the astonishing speech Swami Vivekananda

delivered at the world's first Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in September 1893.

An exhibition on life of Swamiji and his work drew a lot of attention and attracting attendees. The Exhibition comprised of Swamiji's childhood curiosity about God, and his meeting with Sri Ramakrishna. The commemorative event also showcased various facets of Indian culture including dance, music, yoga, tourism and food.

Performances by Korean dance groups, Indian traditional dance, and Bangladeshi-African-Korean artists gave a unique flavour to the event. •

• Thought of the Month •

"While you are proclaiming peace with your lips, be careful to have it even more fully in your heart."

... St. Francis of Assisi



Organizing Team of Vivek Festival 150 with Swami Medhasananda and Mr. Kook Hyun Chang, Secretary General, Indian Chamber of Commerce Korea



News Briefs

Durga Puja

On Saturday 12 October, Bengali Association of Tokyo, Japan (BATJ) celebrated Durga Puja at the Furusato Gekijo theatre in Kawasaki Shimin Plaza. The theatre is a mid-sized hall where the beautiful image of Goddess Durga with Her company of deities and demons from scripture stories was set-up on stage right, decorated with colourful offerings of flowers and candles and foods.

When it came for Pushpanjali (individual prayer and flower offering) there were too many people for prepared flower buds to be offered to Her in a timely manner, so they made offerings in groups, one at a time.

While Japanese devotees from the Vedanta Society of Japan were waiting for their turn for offering, Maharaj explained to them who the images around her were; how they related to Her; what their vehicles were; why She had ten arms; and what weapons She had in Her hands. After Pushpanjali, the participants had lunch Prasad in meeting rooms.

In the afternoon session, the cultural programme included Bengali local songs, Indian traditional dances, and short pieces of drama. The festival gave a wonderful opportunity for groups to get to know each other better and have a good time together.



(con't page 9)

Yamagata Satsanga

Maharaj gave a discourse on “The Purpose of Life” at the Yugakukan in Yamagata, Yamagata Prefecture on Sunday, 3 November. The event was organised by Mr Shunsei Takahashi and attended by forty people. The discourse started at 1:30 pm.

Maharaj said that there are the following six desires in life:

- Desire for good health, or for long-life;
- Knowledge, or to know more
- Pleasure, or to be happy and enjoy oneself
- Liberty, or to be free
- Love, or to love and be loved; and
- Work, or to work to meet the above desires.

Then he gave specific ways to meet them. In fact, they are really met at the level of Atman, or Self, which means one reaches the level of samadhi, or the superconscious status. So, satisfying Atman is “the purpose of life”.

At the questions and answers session starting at 3:10 pm, he said that as one can clean an ink jar by washing it with clean water, so one can clean one’s mind (subconscious mind) by repeating a holy name of God. Answering about how to concentrate, he told how to soothe and settle down one’s mind so it can concentrate, like a parent scolding a child, which was one of the most impressive parts of his answers.

Sendai Discourse

Swami Medhasananda gave a discourse on “Positive Way to Live” as discussed in Bhagavad Gita, at the Aramachi Shimin Centre in Sendai on 4 November. Through his talk, we had the chance to learn from ancient scripture asking ourselves, “Who am I? What is the mind?,” to get to know how to live a positive life and be more deeply aware.

When he was talking about whether our minds are seeking dirty things like flies or something sweet and fruit-bearing like honeybees, we found in laughter what made us think deeply. Some were nodding or kept their eyes closed while listening to the swami’s stories and looking inwardly at themselves. One such story was about a musk deer attracted to a beautiful scent and trying to locate where it came from, when actually the scent was coming from itself.

During the question and answer session, some asked about finding solutions to the problems they had. Maharaj answered these with a sense of humour and everyone was listening attentively comparing such solutions to their own situations.

Fifty people joined, some of whom said in the questionnaire after the programme that they wished to have another opportunity like this, since they wanted more people to hear the swami’s discourse.

(con’t page 10)



Above:
3 Photos from the
Yamagata Satsanga
on November 3, 2013

Below:
3 Photos from the
Sendai Satsanga
on November 4, 2013



• A Story to Remember •

The Woodcutter

A woodcutter led a very miserable life with the little means he could procure by daily selling his load of wood brought in from a neighbouring forest.

Once a Sannyasin, who was wending his way through the forest, saw him at work, and advised him to proceed onward into the interior recesses of the forest, intimating to him that he may be greatly benefitted thereby.

The woodcutter obeyed the injunction and proceeded onward till he came to a sandal-wood tree, and being much pleased he took away with him as many sandal-logs as he could carry, and sold them all in the market and derived much profit.

Then he began to think within himself, 'Why the good Sannyasin did not tell me anything about the wood of the sandal-trees, but simply advised me to proceed onward into the interior of the forest.'

So the next day he went on even beyond the place of the sandal-wood and at last came upon a copper-mine. He took with him as much copper as he could carry, and selling it in the market got much money by it.

Next day without stopping at the copper-mine, he proceeded further still as the Sadhu had advised him to do, and came upon a silver-mine, and took with him as much of it as he could carry, and sold it all and got even more money; and so daily proceeding further and further he got at gold-mines and diamond-mines, and at last became exceedingly rich.

Such is also the case with the man who aspires after true knowledge. If he does not stop in his progress after attaining a few extraordinary and supernatural powers, he at last becomes really rich in the eternal knowledge of truth.

- **Ramakrishna: His life and sayings** by Max Müller

Issued by: The Vedanta Society of Japan (Nippon Vedanta Kyokai)
4-18-1 Hisagi, Zushi-shi, Kanagawa-ken 249-0001 JAPAN
Phone: 81-46-873-0428 Fax: 81-46-873-0592
Website: <http://www.vedanta.jp> Email: info@vedanta.jp